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STUDY PROJECT

GENERAL OFFICER DECISION MAKING: AN INQUIRY
INTO U. S. ARMY GENERAL OFFICER APPROACHABILITY

BY

MR. ARTHUR W. McMASTER III

21 MAY 1986

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USAWC Military Studies Program Paper

General Officer Decision Making: An Inquiry
Into U.S. Army General Officer Approachability

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ABSTRACT

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An Inquiry Into U.S. Army General Officer Approachability

The leader is best
When people barely know that he exists,
Not so good when people obey and acclaim him,
Worst when they despise him...
But of a good leader, who talks little,
When his work is done, his aim fulfilled,

They will all say,'We did this ourselves'.
[1]

Lao Tzu, Sixth Century BC

BACKGROUND

A man this author worked for a few years ago, at a U.S. Army Major

Command HQ, and who had just pinned on his first star, spoke

informally at his investiture as a new Deputy Chief of Staff. "They

told us at the 'charm school' to remember that we (generals) are

appointed not annointed."(anon.)

His anecdote generated some strained noises of amusement; but some

were not so sure they believed it, nor for that matter was it certain

HE believed it. This ambilvalence has persisted. It forms, in fact,

the philosophical backdrop for this inquiry into general officer (GO)

decision making, and particularly with respect to the degree to which

the U.S. Army GO is or is not "approachable". The term is explained

below. The research question here is: **To what degree are US Army**

general officers approachable, and why are some more so than others?

DEFINITION

As to the working definition of approachability, for the purposes

of this study, it is: The observable degree to which a GO is willing

to accept subordinate's unsolicited, or disinctly minority opinion,

prior to making a decision, or the observable degree to which he/she

is willing to revisit a decision already made, though acutually

promulgated. This may imply criticism, albeit proper and courteous.

It always involves a non-threatening environment to surface the

subordinate's opposing or alternate viewpoint. No careers end where

this kind of approachability exists.

The author's bias is that "generalship" must go well beyond what

Sam Sarkesian, writing in Military Review, has dubbed: "the Follow Me

approach to leadership."[2] Class of 1986 US Army War College students

surveyed in this study overwhelmingly agree.

The genesis of this study research derives from a conversation the

author had last year with an officer who had just returned from some

three weeks of TDY to Israel, where he had observed first hand the

routine of the Israeli Defense Force (IDF).[3] His precis-like analysis

was that the IDF operates as well as any military force in history;

and there may be an inherent leadership style integral to that

success. He felt that such success could well be in large part due to

the open communications among officers at senior levels. He called

this easy up-down dialogue "approachability". To wit: when an IDF

colonel has a different viewpoint than his boss, when he has a

problem, or a matter of professional heartburn, he can bring it to the

GO directly and candidly, without fear of being passed off to the

chain of command, or otherwise avoided. Even worse is the boss' anger

that attends the delivery of bad news, even when a challenge from a

subordinate is offered for the best of reasons. These problems do

not seem to bedevil the IDF as they do our military. This is not a

narrowly interpreted phenomenon, but is based upon many observations. Personal anecdotes of senior-subordinate officer communications are replete with stories about that general officer who could always be counted upon to shoot the messenger. The original aphorism, by the way, was "kill the messenger"; and its antecedent was the ancient Persian's cultural modus operandi.

Be that as it may, senior Israeli Defense Force officers agreed with the premise that communications seem to be more open in their organization. Particularly interesting is the expressed thought by one brigadier general that there is a culture bias that favors this sort of candid, professional challenge. One Israeli general also suggested that there is also a special emphasis in the IDF in instilling confidence in their subordinate officers, "full

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approachability probably encourages this." It seemed useful to attempt to determine how relatively well off the U.S.Army is on this count.

SCOPE

In order to validate the thesis it was necessary to look at the military leadership literature, and somewhat more broadly at generic leadership literature. Original, empirical data would also be necessary to find out what War College peers thought about the subject of GO approachability. This is by no means a definitive study on interpersonal communications in the US Army, but is an inquiry into one aspect that seems to need more attention.

The study has three components. In addition to the literature, empirical data was derived from a questionnaire given to 215 War

College classmates, and interviews with nine active duty army generals. The generals were in the grade of MG or LTG. The War College respondents were Army LTCs and COLs, from all branches, and equivalent grade civilians. Appendix A is the student questionnaire; Appendix B is a list of questions posed to the generals. The findings are a result of a content analysis of the data gathered during this study. That part of the literature that was most interesting fell loosely into the subfield of senior and executive leadership and their interpersonal communications. There is not much out there, however. In fact, there seems to be a real gap in the military professional literature on this count,and particularly with respect to the expressed availability by the senior officer to the junior. Key questions in the literature search were: Do senior leaders acknowledge a concept of "approachability"? How institutionalized is any access, to a general officer, in any job? Is there evidence of a successful feedback loop ? What does seem to emerge, however, is a consideration of how the general can best capture the attention of those below him. Certainly access is not seen as mutual, however, and this seems particulalrly true when dealing with the "closed door" generals.

THE LITERATURE

The following presents a consise review of the relevant literature. The focus was on senior military leadership, and certain major factors were singled out for emphasis. Just one of these was institutional obstacles, to include chains of command and staffs, that work against GO approachability. In the conventional wisdom, and the literature tended to bear this out, that chain of command is perhaps

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all too often a part of the subordinate's initial frustration. This theme will be revisited in the general officer interview portion of this study.

Concepts related to approachability in the literature were: Criticism, Feedback, and Interpersonal Communications. An article appearing in the Army Times last year was instructive. The article stated that with respect to the professional development of a general officer "...informal training courses (are conducted) ...(at) civilian institutions such as the Center for Creative Leadership, Greensboro, N.C."[5] In fact, CCL is looking at precisely the subject of approachability to senior executives from below.

In findings on information feedback CCL found there is a tendency for the environment at executive levels to be feedback poor and, "the higher you go the more constricted the feedback channels become."[6] The authors of the report went on to state: "our interviews revealed three factors impeding feedback on executive behavior. These factors are manifestations of the power inherent in the executive's position. They are: the executive's demeanor, this might include his mannerisms; his exaggerated impact, which means his ideas may be considered time urgent, and his relative autonomy, which means it is tough to get to see him sometimes."[7] Discussion in the Army Times article on "Making General" elucidates the CCL argument by suggesting the so called "GO Mystique" can be a barrier to communications.[8]

While this is not just an academic problem, it does not seem to be epidemic either. Recognizably, everyone has worked for very senior

people who were certainly approachable. Why the two camps? CCL

looks at the feedback-conscious boss, the one who wants all the news,

including the critical.

> "Some executives make it a point to avoid becoming isolated
>
> and to solicit reactions to their work (decisions). More
>
> effective general managers build larger networks and make
>
> better, more skillful use of their relationships...the less
>
> secure executives really hide, but the more secure ones will
>
> step out of their offices or go down to the departments
>
> (motorpools), make it a point to stay in touch."[9]

Yet another executive expressed his view to CCL that people two or

more levels below would never be open with him in his office, only if

he went to them.

Mitchell Zais finds an even more fundamental reason for

unsuccessful leadership at the senior levels. "...(T)here is no

doctrinal base which can serve to guide the Army in the selection or

progressive development of field "grade and general officer leaders.

There is not even an agreed on doctrine which distinquishes the

requirements for leadership at higher levels of command..."[10]

CIA officer and erstwhile USAWC faculty member Lewis Sorely writes

straight to the issue. "Accessibility of the commander is

indispensible to effective communications, but it must be coupled with

developing confidence on the part of subordinates that they will not

be penalized for candor or reporting bad news. Otherwise the feedback

process will become irretrievably corrupted, and even commanders who

want to know what it really going on will be thwarted..."[11]

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Such clarity is not often duplicated in the professional literature. Even those "man on the white horse" essays have skipped or missed the accessibiilty and approachability theme. A number of books that set out to discuss "generalship"; including that of the British experience, have missed this mark. So far as can be found in his extensive writings on "generalship", J.F.C. Fuller never mentions accessibility or approachability. Certainly it was not less important in the time of his career than it is today. In his lecture "The General and His Troops" he discusses the general's relations with his subordinate commanders, but only to suggest that "...he (the GO) must be discerning as to their individual capabilities, strengths, and temperaments."[12] He does not suggest the subordinate understanding similar traits of the boss. There is no second side of Fuller's command coin. In the same collection of writings on generalship General Sir Archibald Wavell, in his treatise on "The Good General" also skips the reciprocity, but does note the first order of business for the general is administration, and generally taking care of his troops.[13]

While approachability is poorly addressed in secondary sources, one primary source of real interest was "Leadership for the 1970's", completed in 1971. It was an effort undertaken by 28 faculty and U.S. Army War College students at the request of the Chief of Staff of the Army, and commissioned "...to determine the type of leadership that

would be appropriate as the Army approached the zero draft conditions

of the Modern Volunteer Army."[14]

In his preface to the study, Commandant MG Franklin Davis, Jr.,
stated "...we have attempted to produce a utilitarian report which can
help commanders identify and diagnose leadership problems and discover
ways whereby (the) leadership climate can be improved."[15]   Two of the
participants in this study were LTCs D. "Mike" Malone, and Walter F.
Ulmer, Jr., both of whom went on to influence our thinking on military
leadership. In this landmark study the concept of "approachability"
was broached, perhaps the only other time it has been a subject for
empirical research in the army. The question, however, did not deal
specifically with the approachability of the general officer.

In one instance the so-called leadership performance opportunity
(LPO) is examined with the interrogative: "He communicated effectively
with his subordinates." This LPO was found in the aggregate, and for
all ranks, to be the third most pressing leadership problem emerging
from the 1971 study.[16]   This communications problem was seen to be at
its most extreme at the O-2, O-3 level, and improved with increasing
rank. For the "senior field grade" (O-6) it was ranked overall ninth,
on a scale that ran to 43 in decending order of trouble.[17]

Similarly, the study summarizes all LPO findings for the O-6 level
sample and finds that overall the third most "opportune area for
improvement" was approachability.[18]   A bottom line finding of the
1971 study was " The application of leadership principles is defective
in several results..."[19] They mostly related to communications.

Why do leaders not communicate effectively with their subordinate leaders? Just as the CCL work found the matter largely one of getting closer to those let, the authors of FM22-100, Military Leadership, state that:

> "Leaders at all levels must put themselves in the shoes and situation of other soldiers. They need to see the battle or the training from the eyes of their seniors, their subordinates, peers on their flanks, and support personnel...Information flow must be planned for and encouraged through the ranks. Communications ensures that decisions will be made from knowledge of the situation rather than from a void."[20]

The tone here is clearly tactical, and may not denote interpersonal communications up to and including the senior grades, but its intent is clear enough. The key certainly is to make yourself available to hear any and all communications, interpersonal as much as tactical radio, to make the appropriate decisions.

A similar field manual for senior leaders is in draft form. FM 22-999 (draft), dated November 1985, includes some related material. Here there is a special attention paid to elements of interpersonal communications up and down the ranks. "Those profesionals who communicate that they cannot handle `bad news´ will not receive bad news."[21] The authors of this manual go on to make the larger point.

> "Good communications skills enhance organizational performances, morale, teamwork, and unity. Senior leaders with truly effective communications skills are usually compassionate, trusting, inspirational, and thoughtful -- they

"care! These attributes flow from communications skills:
Interpersonal, Listening"...Language, Teaching, (and)
Mentoring."[22]

Some of these identified skills will be revisited shortly in consideration of the thoughts of general officers interviewed.

Continuing to look at the phenomenon of communications, Janis and Mann have considered "the dominant motivation ...to avoid exposing oneself to nonsupportive information that would arouse conflict." They suggest that "this motivation...can be outweighed by vigilance (sic) tendencies, which make the individual choose to expose himself to opposing communications and to acquire dissonant information concerning unfavorable consequences."[23] This is a training issue, of course, that attends every aspect of supervision. But it begs, too, the matter of choice. It presupposes that a supervisor wants to overcome "the dominant motivation" and open himself or herself to nonsupportive information.

So where must the onus rest for getting through the GO door, whether it is open or closed; on a good day for the boss or bad? The onus must be on both subordinate and GO boss. Warren Schmidt calls it "suasion". Gaining the day, making your point, and not always in direct speech; either party can sway the other with more than words. The boss can send signals that imply more than a listening problem. To elaborate on what Mr. Schmidt says, consider: During conversation with the boss, in a situation where you are trying to gain additional training time or funding for your unit, the boss is also talking on the telephone to his Director of Industrial Operations. Does he hear

you? You might wonder if you have really been heard at all. Warren

Schmidt says that effective communication involves not only speech and

gesture but attitude.[24] This is only common sense, but if we remember

our Janis and Mann, it is always necessary to fight to overcome the

dominant tendency to make decisions incompletely, hastily, and with

only our own counsel. We shut out the dissenting voice. There are

ways to overcome this inertia.

LTG (ret.) Walter Ulmer, for instance, put out clear policy

guidance on the matter, to which he also linked the need to fully

develop responsibilities of your subordinates. General Ulmer's "power

down" concept commits the leader to:

Keep clarifying objectives and priorities.

Push idea exchange.

Delegate.

Develop easy feedback channels upward.

Involve the next lower level of leadership in decision making.

Don't do anything routinely that a subordinate can do as well.[25]

His guidance to his subordinate officers also restates his commitment

to dialoque and leadership development. "The most productive

expenditure of a commander's time is that devoted to explaining the

mission, defining subordinate responsibilities, and clarifying command

guidance. Many subordinates remain reluctant to ask for clarification

they sorely need."[26]

While there has been some attention paid to leadership, there has

been little examination of how leaders can optimize interpersonal

communications, especially at the senior level. The rare exceptions stand out for their brilliant distinctiveness. Thus it is intended that this research effort will detail and better explain the variances within general officer decision making, and especially that aspect identified as approachability.

FINDINGS

STUDENT SURVEY RESULTS

There were 215 questionnaires distributed to the 1986 US Army War College class student body. Selected for participation were all active component and reserve component US Army officers and Department of Army Civilians. A total of 92 questionnaires were completed and returned, with a return rate of 43%. Of the 92, 86 were active component US Army officers, three were Department of Army civilians, two were guard officers and one USAR student responded. This indicates a reasonable cross section of the "full time" active duty members of the class, although obviously not so for the other groups. The profile of the class respondent is as follows:

Mean time in service was 22 years, next common was 21 years.

Branch representation: 16 infantry, 10 field artillery, 8 armor.

22 students were never rated directly by a GO, 15 were directly rated three times, and 14 were directly rated once.

With respect to the number of times an officer worked closely with a GO, on his staff or in his unit, but was not directly rated by him/her, 26 said five times; 24 said twice; fourteen said six or more times.

The respondent profile, then, is the active component infantry

officer with 22 years service. He has worked for a general officer five times. The range, however, went from never having worked for a general to having been there eleven times.

So what did these people have to say about the health of our current GO corps, especially with respect to its corporate approachability? The key really lies in analysis of responses of the following: (The entire questionnaire is at appendix A).

THREE KEY QUESTIONS

Q.8: How many GOs have you worked for, in whatever capacity you were assigned, in the last 4 years?

Mean response was 5; frequency of response was 21 students.

Next frequent was 2; frequency of response was 20 students.

Next frequent was 4; frequency of response was 16 students.

Q 9: Of this number how many were CLEARLY approachable?

Mean response was 2; frequency of 28 students.

Next frequent was 1; frequency of 21 students.

Next frequent was 4; frequency of 16 students.

Note: One officer had worked for 6 approachable GOs. Three classmates had worked for only non-approachable generals.

Q.10: Of this number (w/ref.to Q 8) how many were clearly NOT approachable?

Mean response was 1; frequency of 32 students.

Next frequent was 0; frequency of 25 students.

Next frequent was 2; frequency of 15 students.

Note: Again, four had worked for 3 GOs clearly not approachable. The respondent profile, then, is 5-2-1. That is, War College students

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report that, on average, they have worked for 5 general officers, 2 of whom were clearly approachable, and one was not. The other two, perhaps, sent mixed signals to their subordinates.

It is also important to note that the overall count of approachable general officers, as identified by 92 responses, is 206. The overall count of non-approachable GOs is 86, or about 30% of the total, recognizing that there is some unknown redundancy here. The worst case example reported on the student questionnaire was 6-1-4. The best case had a 6-6-0 count.

INCIDENTS OF APPROACHABILITY

Four questions asked about the means a GO boss might use to let the subordinate know he was available, or approachable, and whether or not his or her approachability contributed positively toward the unit's goals. In a nearly unanimous response it was shown that where a GO boss was approachable this relationship did work toward the overall goals of the unit. Most students made no further comment beyond the affirmation that they had worked for openly approachable people, but, a few did mention the value of feedback in support of goal acheivement. In response to the question how did you know you could talk to him most students responded: "He said so."

INCIDENTS OF NON-APPROACHABILITY

Question 15 essentially asked: How did the non-approachable GO tell you to back off? Students described both verbal responses and non-verbal responses. The verbal and non-verbal responses can be categorized three ways: Hostility, Arrogance, and Avoidance. These are the entirely the author's interpretations.   Most of the

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verbal-type could be related to temper or hostility. In a few

instances the verbal responses represented seemed to be akin to

avoidance. But this was rare, and mostly it was the non-verbal

signals where one saw the effort to avoid the bad news or dissenting

viewpoint. That is to say, the GO simply became unavailable. Table 1,

below, presents selected questionnaire responses:

TABLE 1

Verbal Responses from Non-Approachable Generals

Phrase or Action:	May be Indicative Of:
He lost his temper	Hostility
Shot the messenger (5 respondents)	Hostility
Said "Don't bring it up again!"	Arrogance
"Why do you insist on fighting me?"	Arrogance
He cut you off at the knees	Hostility
Made wise-ass remarks to me.	Hostility
Talked only to the Chief of Staff	Avoidance

Many respondents provided specific thoughts s to where their non-

approachable general officers had actually been non-approachable

without actually saying so. There were numerous such non-verbals. A

few of the clearest complaints are presented in Table 2, on the

following page. These non-verbals behaviors overwhelmingly suggest

an avoidance tendency on the part of the subject general officers.

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TABLE 2

Non-Verbal Responses from Non-Approachable Generals

Action:	May be Indicative Of:
Became unavailable for contact	Avoidance
Refused to even acknowledge me	Avoidance
He seemed to avoid contentious ideas	Avoidance
Would send information out by letter	Avoidance
Gave me explicit non-verbals	Hostility
I never brought controversial things to him	Intimidation
There was NEVER any open dialogue	Avoidance
He demonstrated a don't bother me attitude	Arrogance
He listened to no one!	Arrogance
Hostlile body language (not further ident.)	Hostility
The "Chief" would let you know it was dead.	Avoidance
His tone precluded any further discussion.	Arrogance
His overbearing arrogance did not allow debate.	Arrogance
Mannerisms indicated he wasn't listening.	Arrogance

DOES THE SETTING MATTER?

Question 16 was important because it went after the assumption
that military officers might be expected to have different
interpersonal communications with the GO boss in a tactical situation,
as opposed to a staff setting, such as at the Pentagon or at a Major
Command HQ. Would the "chain of command" loom heavy in the field, and
more so than in Washington?

Students were asked whether a distinction should be made between
the two settings. And if so, why? Sixty-five students felt that
there should be no distinction made; sixteen felt there should be; and
four were uncertain, or wanted to equivocate somehow. Of the 16
feeling there should be a distinction, six students implied or
specified that combat or a like crisis meant all bets are off. One
student prefered at that point the concept of "blind obedience!" A
few of the other particularly telling responses or comments are
provided below. Again, and as a frame of reference, 70% of the
respondents felt there should be NO distinction made. Table 3,
below, details their comments:

TABLE 3

Why No Distinction Should Be Made:

It's really important in either situation to have all the facts.

Leading well is leading well, no matter what or where.

No. It's the same army with the same big jobs...

Effective GOs find time for discussion, even with action
officers.

Best decisions are arrived at through discussions.

We need teamwork. Unapproachable GOs are loosers.

The same rules of common sense apply: encourage communication.

There were also some comments supporting the minority opinion,
and they are provided in Table 4, on the next page:

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TABLE 4

Why Distinctions Should be Made:

Tactical desisions are often easier to change, and are not so
resource dependent.

Tactical decisions have to be made more quickly.

During a crisis there is not enough time for discussions.

Major Command (MACOM) staffs need more input for best decisions.

It's environment dependent.

In the field the GO may feel he doesn't need input because of his
experience.

In the field, the established chain of command dictates the
general's approachability.   .

A ROLE FOR P.M.E.

The final major area that was surveyed had to do with the utility
of feeding these results back into the army leadership mainstream.
Should GO approachability, as a subset of senior - subordinate
communications, be taught in professional military education (PME)
courses? And if so, where? There were 59 students balloting for the
subject to be brought within PME cirricula. Fifteen said no, and six
gave modified answers that were neither yes or no.   Two people
thought it would be phoney to try it, and two others thought it would
not work on some people anyway. Only one student said it was
unnecessary, perhaps suggesting that the systems is just fine now.
And finally one student had the distinctive viewpoint that we should
not try to teach the subject because "general officers should not be
accountable." Certainly this   was a far different sentiment than

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offered by the respondents on the whole, because 59 want to see the

subject formalized into senior officer PME. Where to put it, however,

is not so easy. The question asked if the subject would likely be

taught at one or more of three current places. They are the Officer

Advanced Course; the Command and General Staff College Course, or its

Staff College equivalents; or at the Senior Service College level.

Here is a capsulization of the students' responses:

Course or Level of Instruction:	No. of Responses:
1. Career Course (only)	3
2. CGSC/AFSC (only)	2
3. Senior Service College (only)	16
4. All three levels	27 .
5. Both 2 and 3, above	11
6. Other (write-in)	
GO Orientation Course/Pre-Command	3

The most frequent comment favoring the idea of institutionalizing this

training was: "(It) must be stressed as a leadership value for ALL

officers as part of on-going military careers." The most common

comment in disfavor was that it simply can't be taught (four

students). It was also expressed that GOs who lack confidence are

afraid of feedback, and you can't approach them anyway.

GENERAL OFFICER INTERVIEWS:

What do the generals say? Nine active duty US Army general

officers and one retired general officer were interviewed. With the

former the questions and resultant discussions centered around the

GO's individual approach to his leadership responsibilities, and

particularly with respect to his philosophy on senior - subordinate interpersonal communications. Each interview began with a background discussion on approachability. Each officer was read the same definition used in the student questionnaire. Thus there was no disconnection in terminology. Also explained was the IDF antecedent to the inquiry into this subject. Most generals admitted that it could well be likely that the IDF general officer population may be more approachable. This interpretation will be revisited in the conclusions of this study report.

As a simple profile of the general officers interviewed all were men, all were in the grade of Major General or Lieutenant General, all but two had been a two-star commander, and one of these was an assistant division commander. The other had a similarly demanding field job in the training business. Their specialties were armor, aviation, field artillery, and infantry. Approximately half were in staff jobs at the time of the interview, the others in tactical jobs.

QUESTIONS TO THE GENERALS

The first question asked of each active duty GO was: "How do you/did you usually discriminate between major and routine decisions, and how did you decide where to become personally involved in decision making as a tactical commander?" The tactical commander was a common frame of reference throughout. The question generated much on leadership style, be it personal or formal in structure. It elicited thoughts on lines of authority, delegation of authority, unit and interpersonal communications, feedback, priorities and trust.

Six of nine made special reference to delegating authority, and talked in terms of the "power down" philosophy. One statement is

particularly useful, in recommendation of the decentralized operating style. "The boss should not make decisions that his subordinate can and should make just as well."

Teamwork was specially noted by three generals. Others said they were particularly interested in emphasizing exactly where they should impact. For those currently serving in a tactical job, and one pentagon GO not long from the field, that focal point was "combat readiness."

Finally, one general added to all this a point of caution. Generals can impact on things in ways they may not always recognize they do. For instance, he had once mentioned, in passing, an air safety idea. An alteration was needed. He had not given an order nor had he really even stated the requirement in full, but within a week his staff had spent many thousands of dollars to "make the fix." He learned a lesson in clarity and in tacit tasking. He also thought the general officer who doesn't make himself accessible will suffer ambiquity and ambivalence around him.

On the similar note of a general's influence, one gentleman said he always has to keep in mind "The need to distinquish between garden snakes and cobras." Everything doesn't need his attention. Lots of people can handle the garden snakes. One general said his cobra snake was unit discipline; another chose his unit's resources and their detailed distribution. Still another tied his thoughts on selective influence (picking the cobra) to trusting your people to take care of the business you decide not to get too deeply into. Trust became a sort of watch word throughout most of the interviews with these general officers.

The next question was key to the whole proposition. Six of nine GOs provided their thoughts on when a subordinate might be expected to "query" a decision. Responses are of two varieties. Some are straight forward examples of when a subordinate should get back to the boss. Others seem to offer some insights into the GO's normative sense of when he felt he ought to justify a tough decision. Further asked was: "After your decision has been made, do you feel it is at all appropriate for subordinate commanders to have the opportunity to relook or query that decision with you?"

Four said "Absolutely. Anytime." All agreed in general terms it should be possible. The generals tended to see the real responsibility resting on the subordinate to get the facts and clarify any problems with the boss. "Talk it over before and you reduce the need for 'relooks' However, with new facts it is always another matter". One GO added to this that the boss never wants to be surprised, so indeed the subordinate must get back to the GO for a relook if he has something new. More than one general said a resource issue would always get relooked if you've got a problem with the extant decision. More philosophically, and probably even more representative of a leadership trait sympathetic to the opportunity to win over a subordinate, was this statement: "At any grade you need to be conscious of hearing others. Listening is the key to doing my job well."

TRUST

Stated as an obligation residing with the subordinate one general said "...the obligation of the subordinate doesn't end until the courage of his convictions has been resolved." These thoughts seem

to capture the best in senior officer attitudes about interpersonal communication, and get to the very essence of a related subject – TRUST.

Four of the generals interviewed made specific reference to the absolute necessity for mutual trust in the relationship of senior and subordinate. Trust pervades all these hypothetical situations of how one can get back to see the boss. Firstly, the subordinate has the obligation to do so. The GO has the obligation to hear him out. Each trusts the other to abide by the bargain.

AVAILABILITY

Getting directly to the generals' impressions of their own approachability, two said they thought they were largely perceived as NOT being approachable, it was asked: "To what extent do you feel your subordinates can come to you with concerns about a policy decision?" The immediate follow-on question was: "How do you go about letting subordinates know they can offer a challenge, if necessary?" Please recall that both these questions were asked the students, as well. There were strong agreements between instrument results. While most of the GOs recognized that non-verbals can be strong and must be taken into account, they also felt that you've got to let yourself be available. "Go out and talk to the soldiers. Go down to the motorpool." One general actually stated "Most of us probably think we're a lot better at that (getting out with the soldiers) than we are." A number of the GOs indicated it's a tough problem, and a lot of it is efficient use of schedules, key guys, the chain of command, and so on. But it's not easy.

"You can only be so much available and still keep your staff doing what they're supposed to be doing." This represents some of the ambivalence in the whole issue. There is no secret formula, and the whole thing is ultimately dependent upon the strength of the GO's personality.

Equally devastating can be the infamous closed door. This is the signal, the most explicit non-verbal signal, that means "No Thanks For The Thought" by the senior leader. Of course generals are by no means the only offenders here. Some people send the unfortunate signal that their experience or position obviates the need for input or feedback. So what's the answer? Are general officers available? Are they accessible? Are they approachable? There are mixed opinions from the generals interviewed. For instance, a few wanted to emphasize the chain of command. Others found the chain of command a veritable barrier. The one response that seems most closely realted to the student response is this:

"The subordinate first ought to establish his credibility. If you (the subordinate) have your stuff together you can get in to see me or any general officer. We're not a cookie cutter corps of general. But the subordinate has the responsibility to pick his time and go in and get the job done. It's his responsibility to do that."
Good listening was also mentioned repeatedly. " People don't come in to work out problems with the GO that will not listen, and that does not follow through."

The question of how to send signals, be they verbal or non-verbal, that the general is approachable is worth a closer look. Many of the

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gentlemen were eager to explore it, perhaps because it presents a challenge they recognize as not having a cookie cutter solution. Still, most would deal straight-on with the verbal part of it and let the non-verbal take care of itself. That is, they like to be directly available. Three men use a regular structure for reviewing policy and plans; one calls it a "Futures Group", another calls it a "Committee of 8". In the latter, key staff (general officers and colonels, along with the Command Sergeant Major) talk through what's coming up and what's going down. Most of the nine active generals interviewed mentioned feedback and getting onto the subordinate's turf. Only here can the GO find out what he needs to know. "You can't find out stuck in here (his office)," said one.

One of the more innovative ways to become accessible to your subordinates is to give them a critique sheet to fill out on your programs and policies. One field commander uses a device called a "goal setting target". It is located at the enclosure to Appendix B.

Here the subordinate tells the division commander when he is asking too much - "you're shooting too high on this program, boss" - or when the program needs to be brought back toward the center in its ascribed priority. It also permits the subordinate commander, such as a brigade commander, to designate his own program goal and tell the CG where he thinks he is in his effort and accomplishment. It is ingenious because of its simplicity and accuracy as a feedback instrument from below.

Just as students answered "He told me so" when asked "In what manner did your approachable GO boss let you know you could critique

his/her decision...", the GOs confirmed that they did so directly, verbally or obviously.

Still, that non-verbal does exist. The students talked about hostility, and naturally no such emotion was demonstrated during an interview. But while these generals may not have been any of the "screamers" described by many classmates, more than one GO knew of contemporaries who ARE screamers and who DO shoot the messenger. There are those who say such generals don't prosper, but that seems unlikely because anyone who becomes at least a Major General has certainly prospered. Apparently the messenger shooters are not culled out, and students suggest they are still out there in serious numbers.

ROLE MODELS

Next each general was asked if he had worked for an approachable GO when serving as a battalion or brigade commander. Each was further asked, if so, was there a general who became a role model.

To the first part four said yes, in such a situation that did happen and was a common occurence. Three said they had worked for one or two men like that; two said one, and one general said no. None. Comments on role modeling were mixed. No one said specifically that one or two elder generals had been their role model, but three said that there were attributes of a few of their predecessors that they would conciously model, although LTG (ret.) Walter Ulmer was mentioned by more than one GO as a man who had a terrific impact on his own style.

There were other interesting comments made by the generals that derived from the business about role models. More that one talked

about being a "mission-oriented" leader. "Give a man a job and let him do it". Another two GOs made special mention of the need "to take the time to teach our subordinates."

This sets the stage for the next interview question; this on "mentoring". Toward the middle of six interviews I asked the GO to describe his views on mentoring and to tie the concept to the subject of approachability. The question was not put to three generals because of time constraints. The six respondents said yes, the two are interwoven. One said" History teaches us this lesson; look to the great leaders of WWII to prove the point." I quote, additionally, from two generals' comments on this subject. "Trust is a key indicator of the mentoring relationship." Another said, "Constructive criticism is a tough, sensitive task." Still another indicated that it is a difficult relationship (mentoring), and hard to keep the necessary degree of consistentcy in the relationship when one of the team is a "hard charger". Both parties must be emotionally secure. Of course, it is not always the case that both are so secure, and probably not even likely. The business about being a "hard charger" will come up again, in a different light, shortly.

Before leaving this subject there are the thoughts of one more general, now in the pentagon but recently a field commander. With respect to mentoring, he said he would not relieve a subordinate commander for poor performance of duty. He would, of course, relieve him for other "cause" problems. Rather he would want the guy to correct and learn from his errors. This, too, is a matter of trust.

Next each GO was asked if he felt a distinction should be made between GO approachability in a senior staff position as opposed to a

muddy boots job, hostilities notwithstanding. All said "no, there's
no difference". The same principles and values apply to both. One
man said you've got to make yourself accessible. Maybe that is easier
in a tactical job. It's the kind of work you are doing. In a senior
staff job it may be tougher. Some have to work at being more
approachable. Another, in general agreement about the tactical job,
said: "Time suspenses will get you in a staff job. You can probably
spend more quality time with a subordinate in a tactical job".

GENERALS ON TEACHING APPROACHABILITY

Each general was asked to share his view on the utility of
teaching "GO approachability". One said he wasn't sure you could do
it if you waited until the guy was a general. All said, in general
terms, yes! Most men went on to say that it's not just a matter of
the general's approachability. "Teach and talk leadership styles at
the officer basic course on up". Two generals said that the right
place to teach GO approachability is at the Staff College and the
Senior Service College levels, both. Almost all stated, in one way or
another, that you've got to start early if you're going to turn out
approachable senior leaders, at any pay grade. Here again there are
arguments being made very much consistent with what the students had
to say about teaching the business of generals and their
approachability. One other general added that GO approachability is
just an extension of good leadership at any level, and such leadership
traits should be taught at the pre-command courses.

Others, in agreement, said you must also teach your subordinates
to follow up on things that bother them; it's okay to "penetrate" what

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a umber of generals recognize as "that general officer mystique." So

in fact there is a clear agreement among the general officers that

approachability is indeed a proper subject for examination,

discussion, and improvement via professional military education.

GENERALS ON FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS

Finally each was asked if he wanted to make any other observations

about the subject, or to point the author toward anything else for

consideration in the study. They did indeed. Presented here are two

groups of those thoughts. In both cases, however, there were two

generals with nearly identical ideas.

The first might be called the "acid test philosphy". One GO said

that what one really wants to know is who failed as a general, and

why? You then go back to talk to his successful subordinates and get

their opinions. "They will know why; probably it's a communications

problem".

A related idea was to take what the generals have said pursuant to

these interviews and go back and get some kind of affirmation from

their own subordinates. In any case, GOs felt that feedback is a

complex issue, and subordinates can help every senior leader improve

on his methods for giving and getting it.

Still another idea was voiced by some of the GOs during the course

of the interviews. Approachability can be examined anywhere, that is,

at any level. The AWC Leadership for the 1970s Study recognized this

and examined it from a similar angle. Two GOs who had a special point

to make here told me to go back and look at the colonels and their

approachability. One said he thought colonels are usually less

approachable than generals. He did not offer why. Another general

agreed and felt people became more approachable as they got more

senior. If so it might be fruitful to examine the approachability of,

for example, brigade commanders, and compare the results with those

for division commanders.

That concludes the active duty GO interview portion of this study,

except for any concluding observations. This author had assumed there

should be interviewed somewhat more than nine generals, but the broad

findings would not likely be changed with more GO interviews. More

insight was available, nevertheless, following the interview of active

duty GOs. US Army retired LTG DeWitt Smith, past Commandant of the

Army War College, gave an invaluable interview. He was also the

DCSPER of the Army from 1977-1978. His insight and ideas complement

and perhaps corrobrate major themes of this study.

LTG DEWITT SMITH

On the whole General Smith recognized the difficulty some generals

experience in being "open" with their subordinates. It's something not

everyone in a senior position has learned to do very well. He was

also particularly critical of a pervasive attitude or orientation in

the army that has typically been rewarded, yet it is to him most

dysfunctional. It, too, ties in with GO approachability, because it

causes the subordinate to not want to ask for further help from the

general, or from any superior. I refer to the "CAN DO" attitude.

General Smith decries the environment that selects and rewards the

individual who is seen as a "hard nosed, hard charger" over the more

skilled leader who is not afraid to involve others, even if it means

questioning a procedure or policy.

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He also added some personal recollections of his experiences on the CENTAG staff, where he was the G-3 from 1968-1969. In that situation he had a number of German soldiers working for him, along with Americans. He, too, noticed a marked distinction in cultural orientation. The German officer is taught to be very tough in the courage of his convictions, and will argue for an alternative much as the IDF officers do. They are usually not "CAN DO" oriented. This matters in so far as the wrong people may otherwise be selected for senior jobs in the army. He would like to see the way people are rated as leaders improved. In fact, some unapproachable leaders think they are doing a better job by "getting the job done at all costs", or as quickly as possible, and perhaps are products of the old school that taught its young officers "to do something, even if it's wrong!" You get precious few team leaders or quality trainers with such a mindset. You have to wonder if it is even possible to get leaders who encourage others' ideas or, rather, feel insecure in asking. Of course the facts show there is a predominance of

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approachable officers in our ranks, at all levels.

ASSESSMENT OF INTERVIEWS

The interviews were fascinating and absolutely critical to the integrity of this study. With only a literature search and a student questionnaire the most relevant empirical material would be absent. The interviews were by and large totally open and direct. A few GOs were willing to talk for over an hour. Most interviews ran to about 40 minutes. At no time was an interview terminated precipitously.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Principle findings of this study are:

1. Most general officers are approachable because they work to be. There is no cookie cutter general officer corps. These people have different personalities, personal leadership experiences, and expectations about their subordinates. Some, such as the ten generals interviewed, have strong feelings about approachability and broadly about interpersonal senior-to-junior communications. Be that as it may, while a great percentage of GOs referred to here are apparently approachable, there are certainly many who are not. Making himself approachable must start with making himself accessible. Interestingly, many GOs voiced concern about needing to get past and through their staff people who may be, all too often, sheltering the boss.

2. Insecurity in the job may be a primary reason for not being approachable. This comes through clearly from the literature, the student questionnaire, and the GO interviews. Difficult personalities may account for non-approachability too, and the student questionnaires were strongly supportive of this as a cause. Both classmates and GOs described active duty generals who are tyrants, autocrats, and egotists who will not suffer about them anything but the subservient or "can do" subordinate. But there are also those who will suffer nothing less than perfection.

3. Training is important. Approachability is a viable subject, but must be taught early and reinforced through professional military education. An army of excellence need not be of perfection, although

excellence presupposes great training. There seems to be a strong body of agreement that the Senior Service Colleges and the Staff Colleges should carry the weight of the formal aspects of such instruction. Non-appraochable GOs not only are not great trainers, they don't even hear what's wrong. Generals and students think this can be corrected.

4. Mentoring has been very successful, and most GOs and students favor its continuation. They expect to participate in mentoring. There is, furthermore, a strong correlation in the concept of GO role modeling and mentoring. The students responded that if they were to become generals they would be approachable akin to the style of a man they had once worked for. There was also strong sympathy among generals interviewed that some outstanding leaders they had worked for had influenced their own style. There is apparently a considerable body of "power down" generals, disciples of LTG Walter Ulmer.

5. The correlation was not so strong between the questionnaire and the interview portions of the study regarding the concept that no distinction should be made between staff and field jobs, with respect to GO approachability. All the generals responding to this question (one was not asked) said there's no difference. But only 70% of the students felt that there should be no distinction. There appears to have been some misinterpretation of the word "field", because six students inferred a combat or conflict situation, as opposed to, for instance, a Ft. Hood job. However, when responses of the 6 students erroneously making a combat distinction are held apart from the questionniares the percentage of agreement rises to 85%. The minority points of view that remain for some students, such as the obvious lack of time urgency in the field, may suggest some further research.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings of the literature and the two special surveying instruments it seems clear that the US Army general officer corps is on the whole quite approachable from their subordinates. Nevertheless, there appears to be a significant number of general officers out there that are not at all approachable, perhaps because of insecurity, driving an actual avoidance of their subordinates (the closed door general). To a lesser degree some are not approachable because of arrogance and an apparent hostility that keeps the subordinates away from their bosses. This means that some senior leaders, in any leadership style, are not getting all the information they need. And we cannot ignore the warning that we have picked too many "can do" guys who represent the exact opposite of what is needed in enlightened team leadership and coaching, or personal development. Some generals say such men eventually fail, but "failure" does not seem to be the right term given the number still on active duty.

Training programs exist for enhancing interpersonal communications. One of the best may be that of the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL). A fairly recent rite of passage for new brigadier generals will help assure there is some exposure to good communications and feedback. Still, the 1986 War College students and a number of current active duty generals feel that more such training is needed, and needed sooner. In fact, the strong concensus is that such training must begin early in an officers' carreer and then be reinforced at intermediate-level and senior-level professional military courses.

Very instructive is the special slant given the subject of approachability by IDF officers, and substatiated by General Smith, that culture may be deterministic in a man's leadership profile. The US Army may well have emphasized exactly the opposite of what is needed in the selection of senior people for advancement. This is a systemic problem. It will take quidance from the highest levels in our military structure to change it. Formal education can help.

It can also be concluded that there is a correlation between student officer (classmate) perceptions about GO approachability and what generals themselves think about their own approachability. Two generals said they thought they would be perceived as not approachable. By inferrence, a strong tendency to want to use the existing chain of command may exacerbate the lack of communications between the GO boss and his subordinates. The student respondents found the chain of command to be, on more than one occasion, an avoidance behavior. It may be fundamental as to how available or accessible a leader wants to make himself, or herself. Based on readings into the professional literature, and in consideration of our historical neglect for attention to interpersonal communications, it seems certain that the positive leadership traits discussed in this study can only be realized through formal training and dedicated practice. This also presupposes enlightened selection of officers for senior levels of leadership. The students participating in the questionnaire and the generals interviewed all largely substanitiate this thesis. Leadership training and exercise are as necessary to interpersonal communications as they are to realizing any other goal or objective, be it personal or business, military or civilian. The

tools to gain the high ground of approachability are in place, and the

generals seem optimistic and enthusiastic about the developments.

THE CCL COURSE

Dr. Robert Kaplan, a researcher at CCL, developed a course now

taken by all new brigadier generals at the Center for Creative

Leadership. His materials state: "Through assessment and constructive

feedback, participants ...become more aware of their abilities and

shortcomings. Through "participative learning, with time for

practice, they improve their leadership skills...Principles of

feedback are discussed with an emphasis on how to give feedback that

"is useful and motivating. The participants are taught how to receive

feedback and how to use it as an aid in improving their own

performance."[31]

Feedback training, in fact, is specifically what has been required

for many who, for whatever reason, be it a personality factor or a low

tolerance for criticism from below, could not take the time to hear

others. Recall that the students, in their questionnaires, indicated

some 30% of generals they had worked for were not approachable. Of

course there is no doubt some redundancy in this gross figure.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

It would be particularly interesting and useful to attempt a

follow-on study to this one in five or ten years, using the same

protocol. It would be interesting to see if the respondent profile

didn't improve from 5-2-1. It would be useful, too, to test whether

the now required leadership development courses for all new brigadier

generals, along with a much modified environment that preserves

respect for authority but permits the professional at any level to exercise the courage of his convictions, has collectively changed our perceptions of general officer approachability at the 0-5/GS-13 level, and above.

Of course there are numerous collateral tests of this study that could be done right away, including the survey of colonels recommended by some GOs, specifically of brigade commanders. One might also attempt varying the sample - both the student respondent and the general officers interviewed. There were no interviews of brigadier generals, and these men and women would likely add a different dimension as well. This may be the case because the 0-7 level officer may be closer to the feelings about his or her new status in the general officer ranks. There are as many alternatives as there are the vignettes such as IDF training requirements or cultural expectations of foreign military services.

RECOMMENDED USE OF STUDY FINDINGS

If this study is reasonable valid, and there does exists a gap in approachability styles between general officers, the CCL course, and its feedback training, could be useful for those general officers who have not participated. Recall too that most of the students and all of the generals involved in this study agreed that interpersonal communications should be part of professional military education. Often a question about GO approachability produced a more diffuse interest in simple "communication". That makes sense, of course, as there can be no accessibility, approachability, mentoring or even trust without communication. The generals also tended to think that

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Whatever training is nominated or validated it should begin early and
be reinforced. The senior service college level seems to be the right
place to do that. It is recommended that a synopsis of this study be
presented to future war college classes and that future senior leaders
should be exposed to more formal training, especially in interpersonal
communications from senior to subordinate levels.

Specifically, Course One at the US Army War College, "The
Requirements of the Professional Leader", could and should offer
readings into the subject of senior officer approachability. The
currently structured lesson #1-14-S could perhaps house this
requirement, as it certainly is a function of "Group Development and
Team Building". Here, senior leadership style is discussed already.
Related readings, such as "High Hurdles, The Challenge of Executive
Self-Development", by Kaplan, et al of CCL, should be a part of the
course reading materials provided to all.[32]

Finally, it is hoped that others will look into this phenomenon of
approachability. It is a challenge that can only be met head-on; and
training and exercise promise the means to reduce the incidence of GO
non-approachability. There is probably nothing inherently wrong with
what has been called the general officer mystique. But to the extent
that it may become a barrier to communication, training or "coaching",
and trust, as we do our nations defense business in all grades and
specialties, it must be examined. The real loci of the problems must
then be isolated and corrected. One cannot afford to do less.

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USAWC STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

1.   What is your status at USAWC? Active Army Component __,
NG ___, USAR __, Civilian __.
2.   How many years federal service? ___
3.   How many years commisioned service?___
4.   What is your primary branch specialty? ___
5.   How many total years have you had in command? ____
6.   How many times have you been rated directly by a GO?___
7.   How many times have you worked closely with, but were
not rated directly by, a general officer?____

      With   respect   to   the   established   definition   of
approachability
8.   How man GOs have you worked for, in whatever capacity
you   were   assigned,   in   the   last   four   years   (prior   to
USAWC)? ____
9.   Of this number, how many were clearly approachable?____
10.   Of this number, how many were clearly Not "   ?____
11.   Was your last GO boss approachable? ___If so, did the
relationship (be it in a staff or muddy boots setting) work
toward the overall purposes and goals of the unit?____
12.   In what manner did your approachable GO boss let you
know you could input to his/her decision even though it had
not been specifically solicited?

13.   In what manner did your approachable GO boss let you
know you could critique his/her decision before it was
ordered, signed, or implemented?

14.   In what manner did your approachable GO boss let you
know the subject was closed?

15.   In the most recent instance where you worked for a GO
you deem NOT approachable, in what manner did he/she let you
know the matter was closed, and to stay away from overtures
to relook the issue?

16.   Should   a   distinction   be   made   between   the
approachability   climate   in a tactical, or muddy boots
situation from that of a staff envirnoment, such as the
Pentagon or a Major Command HQ? ___ If so, why?

17.   Would you consider approachability to be in any way
key in any "mentoring" relationship between you and a GO
boss; would you consider it as a prerequisite? Please
comment.

18.   Should you become a general or GO equivalent in your career would you be comfortable as an approachable boss, as herein described? ____ Please comment either way.

19.   Would you like to see GO approachab_lity treated as part of professional military education? ___

20.   Where would you want to see such education or training take place?   a) Career Course Level: b) Command/Staff Level; c) Senior Service Level

   Please circle one or more

APPENDIX B

GENERAL OFFICER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. (Within the context of the field commander) How do you distinquish between major and routine decisions, and how do you determine where to get involved in making them?

2. After your decision has been made, do you feel it is appropriate for subordinate commanders to have the opportunity to "relook", or to query, the decision with you? In what context or situation?

3. To what extent do you feel your subordinates can come to you with concerns about a policy decision?

4. How do you go about letting subordinates know they could offer a challenge, if necessary?

5. As a battalion or brigade commander, did you work for a GO commander whom you considered "fully approachable"? How many? What were the circumstances?

6. Many of my classmates feel that this whole subject of approachability goes to the heart of "mentoring". They assume that there can be none of the latter without the former. Do you agree, and what do you think of "mentoring"?

7. Should a distinction be made between this kind of GO approachability in a senior staff position as opposed to a muddy boots job? I do not include hostilities or warfare here, but rather a DA staff or MACOM job, as opposed to a division or corps field job.

8. Do you think a consideration of approachability should be reflected a senior officer's military training?

9. If so, where would you expect to or want to see it take place?

10. Finally are there any related points you would like to make; is there anything related to all this you would like me to look into?

NOTE: Each active duty general officer gave me permission to use his name to elucidate any points made. I have declined to identify these gentlemen in the body of the study in the interests of fairness to all.

ENCLOSURE TO APPENDIX B: GOAL SETTING TARGET

A goal setting, target similar to that below, is used by one CONUS division commander. It allows subordinate commanders to tell the CG when he is shooting too high, or too low; is asking too much, or too little. The subordinate commander can also let the boss know that the program needs to be brought back more toward the center (bullseye) in its priority.

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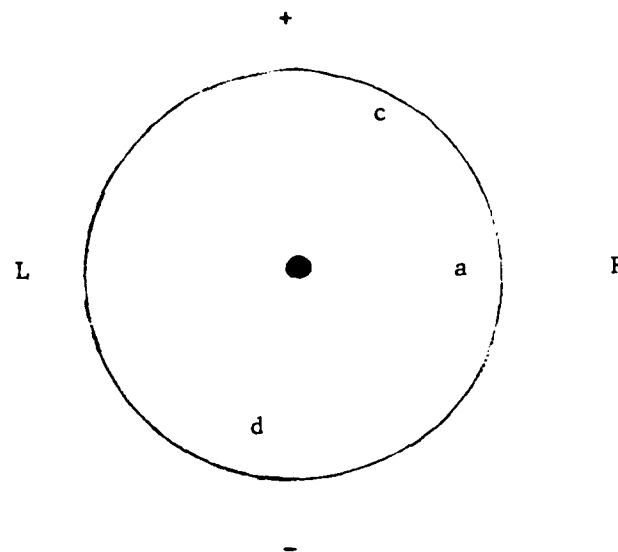
KEY

a: Command Inspection
b: Alerts (Combat Readiness)
c: Gunnery
d: Physical Training
e: Other

NOTE: In the example above, the CG is expecting too much in Gunnery, not enough in Physical Training, and has placed too much emphasis on Combat Inspections. The "Other" category allows the subordinate to get command help for one of his own programs by placing it into context with the CG's.

END

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